6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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long key. This individual is throughout *chief* among the offerers of "pindam" (balls of rice) to the deceased.

The corpse is laid on the bier, with the head to the south, with the fuel laid over it and a little camphor, sandalwood and ghee, if these things are within the means of the Taravâd. Here must be stated the in- [561] variable rule that no member of the Taravâd, male or female, who is older than the deceased shall take any part whatever in the ceremony, or in any subsequent ceremony following on the cremation or burial. All adult males junior to the deceased should be present when the pyre is lighted. The deceased's younger brother, or, if there is none surviving, his nephew (his sister's eldest son), sets fire to the pyre at the head of the corpse. If the deceased left a son, this son sets fire at the same time to the pyre at the feet of the corpse. In the case of the deceased being a woman, her son sets fire to the pyre; failing a son the next (junior) in age to her has the right to do it. It is a matter of great importance that the whole pyre burns at once: the greatest care is taken that it burns as a whole, consuming every part of the corpse. While the corpse is being consumed, all the members of the deceased's Taravâd who carried it to the pyre go and bathe in a tank (there is always one in the compound or garden around every Nâyar's house): the eldest, he who bears the piece of torn cloth and the piece of iron (the key), carries an earthen pot of water, and all return together to the place of cremation. It should be said that on the news of a death the neighbours assemble, assisting in digging the grave, preparing the pyre, and so on, and, while the members of the Taravâd go and bathe, those remain near the corpse. By the time the relatives return it is almost consumed by the fire, and the senior Anandravan carries the pot of water thrice round the pyre, letting the water leak out by making holes in the pot as he walks round. On completing the third round, he dashes the pot on the ground close by where the head of the dead had been placed. A small image of the [532] deceased is then made out of raw rice * representing the deceased, and to this image a few grains of rice and [782] gingelly seeds are offered. When this has been done [515] the relatives go home and the neighbours depart, bathing before entering their houses.

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* The ceremony is called Veli Unka (?).

796 Pishâri Kâvu which represents one of moderate im-
114 portance and truly one of the people, and its narration is fairly complete. It seems to express the religion of the Nâyars as it is when not tacked on to that of the Brâhmans: as they formulate it of themselves entirely in their own way.

796 An important local festival is that held near Palghat,
184 in November, in the little suburb Kalpâti inhabited entirely by Pattar Brâhmans from the east; but it is not a true Malayali festival and it suffices to mention its existence for it in no way represents the religion of the Nâyar. The dragging of cars on which are placed the images of deities, common everywhere from the temple of Jagganath, at Pûri in Orrisa, to Cape Comorin, is quite unknown in Malabar excepting only at Kalpâti which is close to the eastern frontier of Malabar. The Kalpâti
782 festival is the only "car festival" in Malabar.

[131] Near Chowghât (Chavagât), about 30 miles to the
[346] southward of Calicut, on the backwater, an arm of the sea and separated from it by a thin strip of land between the rivers, at a place called Guruvayûr, is a very important temple the property of the Zamorin, yielding a very handsome revenue. I visited this festival on one occasion and saw there much which was of interest but which must find place in the account of regions of others
[126] than Nâyars. Here purchase was made of a few offer-
[532] ings such as are made to the temple in satisfaction of vows. A very rude representation of an infant in silver, a hand, a leg, an ulcer, a pair of eyes, and, most curious of all, a silver string which represents a man—the giver. Symbolization of the offering of self is made by a silver
[326] string as long as the giver is tall! Goldsmiths working in silver and gold are to be seen just outside the gate of the temple ready to provide at a moment's notice the object any person intends to offer, in case he is not already in possession of his votive offering.

The subject of vows can be touched on but incidentally here.* A vow is made by one desiring offspring, to have his hand or leg cured, to have an ulcer cured, to fulfil any desire whatsoever, and he decides in solemn affirmation to himself (it is not necessary to go to a temple for the purpose of vowing) to give a silver image of a child, a silver

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[113] * The subject of vows generally, including description of a Roman Catholic shrine at Cochin somewhat akin to that at Guruvayûr, was treated by me in an article which appeared in the 'Calcutta Review' for January 1899.

months. The last is the day following Siva râtri, the well-known Hindu festival. As it was told to me "Food is offered to the ghosts" on these occasions; to all ancestors, male and female. Food of any kind except cooked rice is offered.* It is cooked and placed in the middle room on the west side of the house, where are kept small images in gold or silver of the senior members of the Taravâd (in poorer houses, a stone simply is put to represent the deceased), and the door will be shut for about ten minutes, after which the food will be removed and eaten by the house people. Special worship of ancestors is often made at the temples specially sacred, on the new moons which have been specified, especially on the last. The plate depicts the crowd in the bed of the Ponnâni river on the day following Siva râtri. Men and women bathed and put on clean cloths and, when they had done so put a little burning camphor, sandalwood powder and some other little accessories, on a leaf which was floated down the river after a brief prayer. The scene of the picture adjoins the temple at Tirunavâyi, supposed to be the oldest in Malabar.

SERPENT WORSHIP.

Description, such as is here attempted, of the Nâyar's religion is incomplete so far. There remains to say something of serpent worship and to make some allusion to common superstitions. For description of these I would refer the interested reader to a capital little book entitled "Malabar and its Folk" published by Messrs. Natesan & Co., Madras, by Mr. T. K. Gopal Panniker, B.A., himself a Nâyar as his name denotes. With this gentleman's permission I will reproduce here chapter 12 of his book entitled "Serpent Worship in Malabar":—

"Malabar is a country which preserves to this day primitive institutions of a type peculiarly fascinating to the ethnologist. Of the various kinds of primitive worship still practised in the country that of the serpent occupies a prominent place. Here the serpent is deified and offerings of pooja are often made to the reptile. It has got a powerful hold upon the popular imagination. Each household has got its own serpent deity possessing large powers for good as well as for evil. A separate spot is set apart in the house-compound as the abode of these deities. This reserved spot is converted into a small jungle almost circular in

* Bread made of rice flour may be offered.

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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776 778 shape. It is overgrown with trees of various kinds, and shrubs, and sometimes medicinal plants also. In the middle of this quasi-circular shrine images usually made of laterite after specified shapes are arranged in certain established methods and a passage is opened to the seat of these images from outside. This spot is so scrupulously reserved, that not even domestic animals are allowed to stray therein. No trees from the place are to be felled down, nor any plant whatever for that matter with any metal or more particularly iron weapons; for these are unholy things, the introduction alone of which inside the sanctified area, not to say the actual cutting down of the tree, is [564] regarded as exceedingly distasteful to these serpent gods. They are not to be desecrated by the touch or even by the approach of [793] a low-caste man. Once in every year at least poojah offerings are made to these gods through the medium of the Numbûdri [782] priests.

796 776 782 "Periodical ceremonies called Pāmbantullel are performed to propitiate them. These are resorted to only on special occasions for the purpose of averting serious visitations from the family. The ceremony is a long complicated process. Any individual drawn from among the Nairs themselves is capable of acting the part of priests on these occasions. A day is fixed for the opening of the ceremony; and a particular plot of ground in the house yard is cleansed and preserved for the performance of the poojahs [532] incidental to the ceremony. Then on the spot certain square figures are drawn, one inside another, and these are tastefully diversified by the interpolation of circular figures and others inside and about them, based on geometrical principles. A peculiar symmetry is observed in the matter of these figures. The figures used in the drawings are usually of various colours, red, white, black and others. Ordinary rice-flour, then again such flour mixed with a combination of chunnam and turmeric powder, thereby making the flour pure red, and burnt paddy husk are chiefly employed. Then a number of other accessories are also required for the ceremony in the shape of lamps, cocoanuts, eatables of various sorts prepared from paddy and rice and some other cooked things, such as rice, bread made of rice, and others. [533] These are properly arranged in the place and poojah is offered by the priest with the slow recitation of *mantrams*, and some holy songs or ballads in memory of these gods. Then a number of Nair women, with perfect purity and cleanliness of person are seated close to each other in a row or two. These women are to preserve sanctity and purity of their persons by a total abstinence from animal food, intoxicants and anything else of an exciting nature for a prescribed period of time; and it is only after the lapse of this period that they become worthy of being admitted to

7:Gough E-5 (1947-1949) 1955 AWll Kerala AWll
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much the same part as did its maternal and affinal kinsmen to a patrilineal lineage in the lower castes. Individual *enangar* were moreover often of course affines (*bandhus*) to members of the lineage. But among Nayars, the marriage-tie was so slender that individual affinal bonds were not, it seems, strong enough to unite the lineage to the rest of the sub-caste group. This was achieved instead by a hereditary relationship between lineages as groups, which persisted irrespective of the making and breaking of marriage ties between them.

In these retainer sub-caste groups the *tāli* must be tied by an *enangan*. Each girl had a separate bridegroom, usually a youth who might have already formed *sambandham* relationships of his own. The *tāli*-tiers were chosen at a local assembly. The choice was made by the village astrologer, who compared the horoscopes of the girls with those of suitable young men and fixed the auspicious date and time for the ceremony to take place.

In Kiriyattil, Samantan, and royal lineages, whose women frequently or invariably married men of higher sub-caste, the *tāli*-tier was chosen from the appropriate higher sub-caste. Women of village headmen's lineages were commonly 'tied' by men of their district headman's lineage, and Sāmantan women and Cochin princesses by Nambūdiri Brahmans. Calicut princesses had the *tāli* tied by men of Kodungalur, one of the ancient ruling lineages which had been conquered by Calicut. Similarly, Walluvanād princesses had the *tāli* tied by men of the lineage of Beypore, a more ancient and therefore higher-ranking lineage than their own of an adjacent small kingdom which was also feudatory to Calicut. In these sub-castes the 'bridegroom' was usually an elderly man.

The account which follows was given by Sūdra Nayars of Pālakkara, the Cochin village where I worked. In Pālakkara, the *tāli*-rite in its full form has not been performed for twenty-two years, and, like many of the traditional rites of Nayars, it is doubtful if it will ever be performed again. This description refers to this most recently held ceremony, at which the *tāli*s were tied for nineteen girls, ranging in age from two to twelve, of a lineage comprising twelve property-groups.

The ceremony required the co-operation of the whole village, which at that time was coterminous with the *tara*. It was held in the lineage's oldest ancestral house. A shed of bamboo and palm-fronds was erected before the house, the first corner-post, of areca-palm wood, being planted ceremonially by the carpenter. A man of the temple-servant caste of Kurups drew a picture of the Malabar goddess Bhagavadi on the floor of the shed, of the type drawn in the village Bhagavadi temple at festivals to the goddess. Nayar men of the village then went and cut down a branch of the milk-exuding tree of Bhagavadi from near the village temple. This they planted near the corner-post in the floor of the shed, in order, informants said, 'to bring Bhagavadi to the *taravād* and set up a temple in the house'. A plank of wood of the same tree was set in the shed for each girl to sit on in turn.

All *enangar* of the lineage, and representatives of every other Nayar house in the village, attended the four days of ceremonies. On the first morning, the girls went in procession to the shrine of the lineage's *dharma devi* (goddess of moral law). This goddess, represented by a stone image, is the lineage's private Bhagavadi. She is propitiated annually with cooked food to ward off sickness and misfortune. Similar offerings were made now, and the procession returned. Young men of the lineage then went to meet the bridegrooms, who arrived on elephants with their male age-mates, accompanied by music. At the gate married women of the lineage met them carrying brass plates each containing a lit wick, paddy, rice, and a spray of coconut flowers. The bridegrooms' feet were washed by brothers of the girls and they were seated in the marriage-shed. Near the picture of Bhagavadi were laid paddy and rice, coconut flowers, the sacred brass lamp of the household, and a tray of eight auspicious objects (*ashtamangalyam*). These included a woman's loin-cloth, a rouge-box, a bell-metal mirror, an arrow, a coconut-spray, rice, paddy and a lit wick; they figure also in the Nambūdiri

8:Panikkar I-4, 5 (no date) 1918 AWll Kerala AWll Nayar

ceremony is to be performed and each of them puts on a mask made for the occasion and paints himself in such a way as to look really terrible. The mask of each has a different expression. At about 8 o'clock in the night, the girl (or girls) possessed of the devil is brought in front of the house where are gathered all the people of the village. The whole place is illuminated with big lamps and the girl sits alone, sometimes supported by her mother. Then one by one the masked magicians come before her and execute most frightening dances to the accompaniment of terrifying music. In dancing they make various gestures, possibly with a view to mesmeric effect, and throw various sorts of power, and *rudhiram*, prepared to look very much like blood, is brought into great prominence. Dancer succeeds dancer, each more terrible looking than his predecessor, and the poor girl loses control of herself and falls into a sort of hysteria, in which the devil in her confesses where it came from and who prompted it,[1] etc. In that case the dance is supposed to have been successful and the devil is supposed to have been cast out.

This *Kolam Thullal* is performed on various occasions. The only time I have witnessed it was in 1913, when passing through a village situated in the very heart of the country. The "subject," on that occasion, was a child-mother of fourteen, and the reason for the performance given by her brother, when asked by me, was that the girl had fainted four or five times during the month "without any cause," that they had found out through the astrologer that her husband's relations had been trying to cause trouble by evil magic.

A milder and less expensive form of the same dance is *Velan Thullal*. In this only one man dances with almost the same paraphernalia as the *Kāniyāns* have for *Kolam Thullal*. This variety, however, is generally used only to cure children.

Such performances are only for the ghosts of dead men who have entered into girls or children. But if *Kutti Chattan* tries to do harm, these practices are of no avail. *Kutti Chattan* (sometimes merely *Chattan*, *Kutti* means boy, a term of endearment, *Chattan* is supposed to be a corrupted form of Satan) is in no sense a god. He is something like Puck, very much inclined to mischief. He is supposed to be a dwarf, though he can assume any other form or remain invisible as he chooses. He never goes out of his way to harm anyone, though if anybody injures him once, *Kutti Chattan* never forgives and keeps on troubling him for life. His favourite method of annoying anybody is by throwing stones at the house or dropping unclean things in the food. He may do so without interruption, which would render life almost impossible. He is supposed to have no fingers and, therefore, his vices can be thwarted by people who know it. For example, he cannot pick up things if kept in a place

[1] Note: the "confessions" are without doubt due to subconscious suggestion. The whole scheme of the dance—the music, the masks, the lighting—seems to be arranged with the sole purpose of rendering the "subject" liable to suggestion. More than this, the girl herself believes that she must be possessed of some ghost, and therefore the ground for suggestion is already prepared.

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
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partly guided by the influence of the monsoon. In regard to the serpent grove or religious shrine, a square plot just in the middle of the south-west portion is considered the most auspicious. A typical Nayar house is quadrangular, with an open space *(mittam)* in the centre; the western portion of it is the granary, while the rest of it is partitioned into rooms. The northern portion comprises the store-room and the kitchen at the western and the eastern extremities, with the dining room in the middle, while the western and eastern portions are kept as open halls for gatherings on important occasions. The house so constructed must face the rising sun—the east—and yet rather inconsistently it is called the *patinjattupura* or the western roof or building. The reason of this is that the *patinjattu muri*—the central chamber or the honoured guest chamber in the house, sanctuary of the ancestors of its occupants—must be so placed as to admit of entrance through its doorway the sun's earliest rays. Behind one or more of the rooms above mentioned is a *chaippu* forming a kind of enclosed verandah room. Another type most commonly met with consists of a portico serving as a reception-hall, the other portions of the building corresponding in details, more or less, with the quadrangular edifice just described. The rigid adherence to the science of architecture is confined not only to the Nayars and other high caste-men, but also to the generality of the Native Christians and Mahomedans who, before construction, always consult some expert in the choice of a proper site and the formation of a ground plan of the house. Misfortunes or even calamities are often attributed to the violation of these principles, and very often a newly built house is either altered to remedy the defects or even pulled down. There are again houses, where the two types are combined. The huts of the poor classes consist generally of one or two small, dark and ill-ventilated rooms with a kitchen at one end, and a verandah either in front or on all sides of the main building. With the increase of population, and with the demand for more houses, the old notions and *sastraic* injunctions are being overlooked as a matter of necessity, and the old fashioned houses are displaced by those erected on sound sanitary principles. The wood-work of the buildings is solid and substantial, and is in some cases beautifully carved. The walls are generally of laterite, brick or mud, and roofs which till

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
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played. There are also other kinds of plays, which are called *Attakkathas* (plays in which the incidents are represented by dancing and gestures) in Travancore, and *Kathakalis* in Malabar. Many additions to these were made by different scholars in different times, and they now number about fifty-six, most of which are now being acted. Many or all of them possess a high order of literary excellence, and are, year after year, prescribed as vernacular text books for University Examinations.

Personal adornment of the actors.—In the beginning the actors had no regular dress as at present, nor was there any curtain dividing the audience from the stage. The only theatrical property known in those days were figures clumsily drawn upon the bark of the areca palm and attached to the bodies of the actors, while the orchestra consisted only of the *maddalam*, a kind of drum. But innovations were soon introduced, and the first of these were those introduced by the Tirúr or Bettattunad Raja.

It may not be out of place here to give a short sketch of a day's performance as it is to-day. A travelling company, which usually consists of twelve actors, four singers, and four musicians who form an "orchestra with drums (*maddalam* and *chenda*), gongs (*chengalam*) and cymbals (*elathálam*)", is invited and lodged in a house near which they are to give the performance. In the morning they are given gingelly oil for an oil-bath, and are then served with rice, *kanji*, and *pappadam*. This forms their breakfast. After it, they retire to sleep till about four o'clock in the afternoon. At five o'clock they are treated to a sumptuous dinner, and half an hour later begins, by beat of drums and other musical instruments of the company, a formal announcement to the villagers in the neighbourhood that a play is to be performed that night.

The stage is nothing more than a crude wooden structure slightly raised from the ground. The drop curtain consists usually of pieces of cloth sewn together and the figure of a god or an animal drawn thereon. The auditorium consists of mats strewn on the floor for the audience to sit on, while two bell-metal lamps, containing cocoanut-oil and wicks of rolled cotton cloth, are the only means of lighting the theatre. Sometimes to add to the solemnity of the occasion conch shells are

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
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796 to have been a period of uninterrupted peace, plenty, and pros-
773 perity. Growing jealous and apprehensive of the glory and greatness of this great king, the Dévás entreated Vishnu to quell the pride of this earthly potentate; and Vishnu, thereupon, appeared as *Vámana* (dwarf, his fifth incarnation) to request him for a plot of three feet of earth. The prayer was readily granted by the sovereign, who found to his cost that he could not satisfy him; for, large as his kingdom was, it was found to be very small when measured by the *Vámana*, who eventually placed his foot upon his head and pushed him down to the regions below. Grieved at the loss of their dear king, his subjects prayed to Vishnu to allow him to re-visit the earth once a year, and this is popularly believed to happon on the *Tiruvónam* day.

796 The festival is celebrated in honour of his re-appearance, and with it the return of happy days. It is practically confined to four days which are observed as holidays throughout Kérala, and people of all ranks from the prince to the peasant acknowledge them as such. Ten days before *Tiruvónam*, signs of the approaching festival are visible in every Nayar house, which, by its neatness and cleanliness all around, puts on a gay appearance. A portion of the front yard of the house, opposite to the store-room, is selected, and there a temporary stall of mud is put up for the royal visitor to sit upon. Flowers are strewn over it and on the night previous to the auspicious
[532] day, pyramid-shaped images of the king made of wood or clay, called *Trikkákarappan*, are placed upon it amid the deafening cheers of the members of the family who assemble at the gate to greet him. *Pujas* are daily made both in the morning and evening before the inmates take their meals, and this con-
[431] tinues up to the closing of the festival. In respectable families the festival opens with the presents of cloths by the *kárana-vans* to the junior members of the family as well as to other close relations, servants, and others. This is also the occasion when tenants make gifts of curry-stuffs, chiefly banana, for the celebration of the festival, and they are often rewarded with
796 cloths and also fed. A feast is held on a large scale, all the
574 four days, while the essential element in it is the consumption of
[262] bananas or *nentranpazham*. The fruits are cut into two or three pieces, boiled in water, and are eaten alone or with *pappadam*.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SUDRAS OF COCHIN.

A. THE HIGH CASTE SUDRAS (NAYARS

(Continued).

564 771 776 Religion. The high caste Nayars profess Hinduism and follow most of the religious practices of the Brahmans whose influence in matters religious as well as social is supreme all over the State. They worship the superior deities of the Hindu pantheon (Siva, Vishnu, and their consorts, as also Ganapati) in *ambalams* or *kshetrams* (temples) of which there are in the State many that have long been in existence. Everywhere in the State the caste-men and women with their children may be seen going to worship the deities in their local temples both morning and evening after their baths in the [264] public tanks. It is only after this worship that they take their meals, and seldom do they depart from this rule. They also adore the minor deities, namely, Subramanian, Ayyappan, Sástha or Vettakkorumakan, Bhagavati, as well as Kali, the goddess of small-pox, and malignant demons, such as, Kutti-[346] cháttan, Mundian, Gulikan, Gantákaranan. But these deities or demons are located in *kávus*, mere unpretentious structures with the characteristic tiled roofs and ornamental gables. [532] These deities are represented by carved or uncarved pieces of stone placed on elevated seats beneath the *ál* (Ficus religiosa), the *pala* (Echites scholaris), or the *kánniram* (strychnos), and the priest is usually a non-Vedic Namburi, an Elayad, a Músad, [782] or one of the Sudra castes. The deities such as Subramanian and others above mentioned, are the sons of Siva, and require no animal sacrifices, but the host of demons require to be propitiated with offerings of goats, or fowls, while their wishes are often interpreted by oracles, who are known as *velichapads*.

The Cochin State, as well as Malabar and Travancore, is the land of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, and as well as

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belief in animism, and all these are largely mixed up with the religion of the Nayars. Animism refers to the belief that man passes through life surrounded by a ghastly company of powers, elements, and tendencies, impersonal in character, mere shapeless phantoms of which no image can be made and no idea can be formed. Most of these have departments or spheres of influence of their own—one presides over cholera, another over small-pox, yet another over cattle disease, some dwell in rocks, others haunt trees, and others again haunt rivers, whirlpools and waterfalls. All of them require to be diligently propitiated by reason of the ills and calamities which they bring about, and the essence of these practices is magic.

Evidence of a wide-spread belief in the worship of ancestors is to be seen in the kistavens (*thoṛppi kallús*)—the rock caves containing the sepulchral urns found in the jungles and other parts of the State—in the ceremonies performed and the offerings made for the spirits of the dead. They are worshipped even now in special *kávús*, sometimes even in small out-houses or special rooms in the house on new moon days or *Sankrántis*, and there are also periodical commemorations on the anniversaries of the ancestor's death. Dead ancestors are also represented by stones or small images of gold or silver kept in the middle room of the Nayar houses, and offerings of food and drink are made to them on new moon and *Sankránti* nights. Animistic again is the worship of Káli or Bhagavati who presides over small-pox, cholera, and the thousand maladies that flesh is heir to, the worship of animals and plants and lastly the belief in exorcism and witchcraft in which Brahmans also share.

Serpent worship.

Serpent shrines (*Nágattán kávús* or *Nagakóttas*) are to be found in the compounds of every Nayar house in the Cochin State, and their worship occupies a prominent place in the religious life of the Nayars and other castes. The following mythical origin is ascribed to the adoration of serpents in the Keralólpathi.

The first Aryan colonists settled by Parasurama found Kerala absolutely uninhabitable, and finding it impossible to improve their condition, returned to their old country. After their departure, the Nágas (or serpent gods) of the lower world or *Páthála* took possession of the partly reclaimed land and settled

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773 778 825 [776] thereon. The early colonists, on a second venture, finding the land occupied, commenced a war against the Nágas, but Parasurama acting as arbitrator, decided in favour of the early colonists, and ordered that they should set apart a corner of every compound as an abode of the serpent gods. He further ordained that these allotted places were to remain virgin-ground, untouched by the blade of the knife or the prong of the fork, while the under-wood and the creepers were to be allowed to grow in wild profusion, and to such the name *kávu* (grove) was given. In it are generally planted several 778 771 825 stone idols of serpents placed on a stone-basement called *chitrakúdam*, the whole being held sacred and reserved by a low wall round it to prevent cattle or children straying into [782] that space. The propitiation of serpents is deemed essential [753] to the prosperity and well-being of every house-holder, and periodical offerings are made to them, while the neglect of [776] these is considered to cause leprosy, sterility, or ophthalmia, among the members of the family. These serpents are therefore regarded as tutelary deities of the family, and the gods along with the shrines are conveyed with the property and frequently specified in deeds of transfer.

793 795 778 825 [782] The high priest of the serpent cult is the Pámbu Mékkát Nambuthiri, who lives in a house full of cobras which are said to be harmless to his family. Whenever an image of a serpent from a grove has to be removed from one place to another, he is sent for on the belief that he alone can do it after due propitiation and offerings, and any tree that is cut down for this removal must be sent to the local temple to be used as fuel. [564] [841] [783] [787] The serpent grove should not be polluted by a member of the low caste, or by a woman during her menses; and when it is so polluted or otherwise spoiled, a member of the family of the Nambuthiri priest has to be informed. He gazes into a vessel filled with oil, points out the evil and suggests the remedy. 771 778 825 [841] [782] [532] The ninth asterism in every month is specially selected for snake worship in Nayar families, when offerings of milk and water are made to them. It is said that the approach of a woman during her menses will cause serpents to vacate the grove because of the impurity, and Pulluvans are required to sing songs and perform certain ceremonies to cause them to re-enter the shrines. Images of these serpents are sometimes

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made even of gold or silver and consecrated for worship in Brahman houses. They are also presented to Brahmans by those on whose date of birth an eclipse falls, and this is done to mitigate the wrath of Ráhu.

Cases of snake bite are of frequent occurrence in the northern parts of the State where snakes abound; and nowhere else is the Hindu treatment so skillfully practised as to effect a radical cure by medicines and incantations. When information regarding snake bite isconveyed to a physician, or a bitten man is taken to him, the latter can, by the chirping of a lizard or other tokens, make out the nature of the case and also whether it is curable or not. It is said that physicians should not go to a patient's house, and the following story is given in explanation :—

Once when the emperor Parikshit was ordained to be bitten by the great serpent Takshaka, the latter set out in the disguise of a Brahman. On his way he met another Brahman, who, on enquiry, turned out to be a physician on his way to cure the king. With a view to test his ability, Takshaka bit a tree which was at once reduced to ashes, but the physician removed the poison, and the tree regained its former state. Takshaka, admiring his ability, loaded him with immense wealth and dissuaded him from going to the king. He also made him promise that he should never volunteer his services in such matters unless patients were taken to him. In some families the profession is hereditary, the most prominent among them beingt he families of Kokkára Nambuthiri and Máliyakal Karta.

Tutelary deities.

In every village are to be found guardian deities that protect the villagers from the malevolence of demons which are supposed to occupy an intermediate place between gods and men. The temples of the Nayars in which are enshrined these village deities or *Gráma-dévatas* are far less imposing than those of the Brahmans and are callad *kávus*. The deities commonly represented are the consort of Siva or some manifestation of that female divinity, and Ayyappan or Sasta; and these are supposed to keep in subjection the demons and spirits which are ever prone to do harm to the people of the village. Thus, though the demons are objects of worship, the propitiation of the guardian deities and the festivals held in their honour are considered to be sufficient to curb

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776 [782] the malignant propensities of those spirits. The most popular of the festivals is the *Mandalam*, which begins on the first of 796 Vrischigam (middle of November) and lasts for forty-one days. 776 In addition to the daily *pújas* to the image of Bhagavati by Brahman priests, special rites and ceremonies (*Kúlamezhuthum Páttum*) are also performed by a particular class of Sudras to the figure of the goddess made on the floor by means of 776 coloured powders, while the devotees sing songs in her praise 796 to the accompaniment of lute-like musical instruments. A [534] man in a fantastic dress with an array of jingling bells round [532] his loins, heavy sounding bell-metal anklets on each foot and a scythe-shaped sword in his hand impersonates the goddess and dances to the sound of tom-toms round the figure of the god- [785] dess Bhadrakáli on the floor. The *Velichapád*, as he is called, [787] becomes highly excited and in his frenzy sometimes even cuts his forehead and causes it to bleed. He speaks, or rather the deity speaks through him, in broken yet commanding tones wholly unlike his own and makes oracular responses to the enquiries addressed to him.

796 On a night in the latter part of the month of Dhanu (early 776 in January), a golden image of the goddess is placed on the back [532] of a big decorated elephant, and, amidst the beating of drums, [788] the firing of pop-guns and crackers, is taken out in procession. [231] The elephant with the goddess is supported on each side by elephants whose numbers vary according to the means of the [791] villagers. The *Velichapád* is indispensable and is accompanied by a group of well-dressed women and girls, each carrying in her hand a plate (*tálam*) full of rice and a light placed on the [782] top of it. The festival ends with a display of fire-works, and the ceremony closes with the sacrifice of goats or fowls. On the same principle but on different lines are celebrated various propitiatory and sacrificial festivals in honour of the other [782] aforesaid deities. Generally, after the harvests, the *Velicha-pads* are taken out in procession to the Hindu houses in each village to receive offerings of a measure of paddy and small coins.

776 *Sásta* or *Ayyappan*.—According to Keralólpathi, Parasu- 778 rama with the object of protecting the newly created country (Kérala) is said to have established many temples and dedicat- [788] ed them to this deity. The most important of these is at Sabarimala in the Chengannur Taluk of Travancore, which

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with the hand which is, in token of veneration, then raised to the head. Milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung are mixed together and used for purificatory ceremonies; and the images of [237] gods are anointed with this holy mixture called *panchagavyam*. [778] Small doses of it are even taken internally, and it is [755] considered an antidote against poison, besides being prescribed as a *prâyaschit* or expiation for offences against caste, whereas [778] the sprinkling of water mixed with dung removes sin or pollution [783] from all persons, places, or things, and purifies them. The bull, the vehicle of Siva, is also held sacred, and a statue [532] of it in granite is either placed in front of the image of Siva or in a separate shrine, and is worshipped as a God. [776] The lizard associated with Siva, the monkey with Hanumán, the Garuda (the brahmany kite) with Vishnu, and the peacock of Subramania are a few of the other animals of Hindu veneration.

Of the birds of ill omen, one species of owl called *pullu* 825 is much dreaded because of the belief that it causes an illness 753 to children which results in emaciation. At the sound of its screeching, children are taken into a room to avoid its injurious gaze. Various are the propitiatory ceremonies performed [782] by specialists to secure its good-will and to prevent its doing harm to babies; [789] and amulets are worn by children as a preventive against its evil influences. Its hideous screeches are always associated with death.

Among trees, some are worshipped while others are used 771 for *pûjas* or sacrifices. Among the former may be mentioned 824 the pipal (Ficus religiosa), a tree which is held in veneration by the Hindus. Persons afflicted with maladies or whose planets are unfavourable, go round a pipal tree, seven, twelve, [755] forty-one, or one hundred and eight times, muttering prayers and burning camphor and other incense at its foot or perchance engage Brahmans to do so, in the belief, that it will cure disease or counteract evil influences. The *vilva* (Ægle marmelos), whose leaf of triple form is supposed to represent the three eyes of Siva, and symbolise his triple function of production, destruction, and re-production, and the *tulsi* (Ocymum sanctum), which is sacred to Vishnu, are also worshipped. In [778] front of every house, generally on the eastern side, or in the central yard of a quadrangular structure, is a stone or mud altar, on which *tulsi* or the *vilva* is planted and watered every day, and is worshipped by the inmates of the house. From

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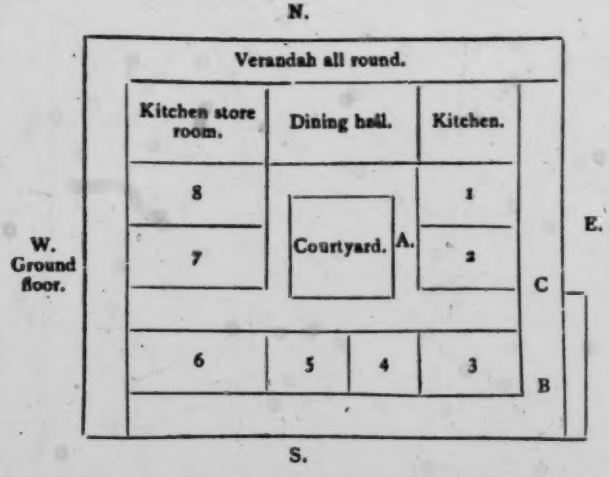
the water leak out by making holes in the pot as he walks round. On completing the third round he dashes the pot on the ground close to the spot where the head of the dead had been placed. This circling round (*Kumbhapradakshinam*) is said to symbolize that the deceased has had his ablution in the water of the Ganges. Then the chief mourner and others bathe in a tank or river, perform an ablution of water (*Udaka-kriya*) to a piece of *karuka* grass stuck up to represent the spirit of the dead. A small image of the deceased is then made out of raw rice, and to this image a few grains of rice and gingelly seed are offered. When this has been done, the relatives and the neighbours who have been there depart, taking care to bathe themselves before entering their houses.

The ceremony next in importance is the *Séshakriya* (making offerings to the deceased's spirit) which begins on the second day after death and continues for seven days, the particulars of which are as follows:—All the male members of the family, junior to the deceased, bathe and return home. The eldest of them who has the torn cloth and the piece of iron, together with the others, assemble in the central court-yard of the house, where there has been prepared by their *enangan* Chithayan, some boiled rice, a few gingelly seeds, a few leaves of the *cherula*, some curd, and a small measure of paddy, rice, and turmeric. All these are placed in the north-east corner with a lamp locally made. A piece of palmyra leaf, about a foot or so in length and the width of a finger is taken, one end after being knotted, is placed in the ground, and the long end is left sticking up. This leaf represents the deceased, and the rice and other things are offered to it. The following is the belief concerning the use of the palmyra leaf:—There are in the human body ten humours, *Váyus*, *Prúnan*, *Apánan*, *Samánan*, *Udánan*, *Vyánan*, *Nágan*, *Kúrman*, *Krikalan*, *Dévadathan* and *Dhananjayan*. There are *Desavayus* or ten airs. When cremation was performed for the first time, all excepting the last were consumed in the fire, while the last flew up and settled on a palmyra leaf. This was discovered by some Brahman sages, who by means of *mantrams* forced it into the palmyra leaf. So it is thought that by making offerings to this leaf for seven days, the spirit of the deceased will be pacified.

The place where the leaf is to be fixed is first cleaned carefully, and the leaf is then placed in the centre of the prepared

342 [823] 351 west, never north or south; as a rule, it faces the east. Every garden is enclosed by a bank, a hedge, or a fencing of some kind, and entrance is to be made at one point only, the east, where there is a gate-house, or, in the case of the poorest houses, a small portico or open doorway roofed over. One never walks straight through this; [184] there is always a kind of stile to surmount. It is the same everywhere in Malabar, and not only amongst the 342 556 Nāyars. The following is a plan of a nālapura or four-sided house, which may be taken as representative of the houses of the rich :—



Numbers 6 and 7 are rooms, which are generally used for storing grain. At A is a staircase leading to the room of the upper storey occupied by the female members of the family. At B is another staircase leading to the rooms of the upper storey occupied by the male members. There is no connection between the portions allotted to the men and women. No. 8 is for [532] [613] [735] the family gods. The Karanavans and old women of the family are perpetuated in images of gold or silver, or, more commonly, brass. Poor people, who cannot

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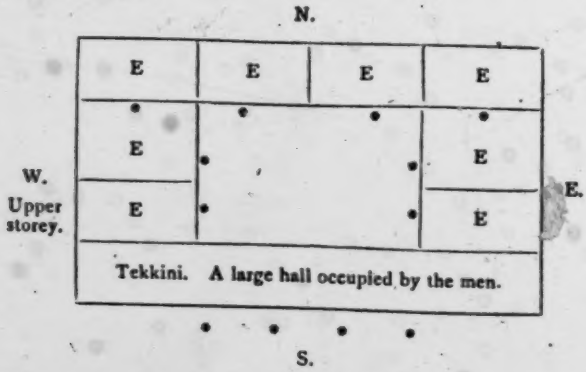
afford to have these images made, substitute a stone. [532] Offerings are made to these images, or to the stones at [613] every full moon. The throat of a fowl will be cut outside, [735] and the bird is then taken inside and offered. The [782] entrance is at C.



There are windows at * * *. E are rooms occupied by women and children. It may be noticed that the [513] apartment where the men sleep has no windows on the side of the house which is occupied by women. The latter are relatively free from control by the men as to who may visit them. We saw, when speaking of funeral [351] ceremonies, that a house is supposed to have a court-yard, and, of course, it has this only when there are four sides to the house. The nālapura is the proper form of house, for in this alone can all ceremonial be observed in orthodox fashion. But it is not the 342 ordinary Nāyar's house that one sees all over Malabar.

The ordinary house is roughly of the shape here indicated. Invariably there is an upper storey. There are no doors, and only a few tiny windows opening to the west. Men sleep at one end, women [513] at the other, each having their own staircase. Around the house there is

342 always shade from the many trees and palms. Every house is in its own seclusion."

Concerning Nāyar dwellings, Mr. N. Subramani Aiyar writes that "the houses of the Nāyar, standing in a separate compound, have been by many writers supposed to have been designed with special reference to the requirements of offence and defence, and Major Welsh states that the saying that every man's house is [244] his castle is well verified here. The higher ambition of the Nāyar is, as has frequently been said, to possess a garden, wherein he can grow, without trouble or expense, the few necessaries of his existence. The garden surrounding the house is surrounded by a hedge or strong fence. At the entrance is an out-house, or patipura, which must have served as a kind of guard-[356] room in mediæval times. In poorer houses its place is [237] taken by a roofed door, generally provided with a stile to keep out cattle. The courtyard is washed with cow-[532] dung, and diverse figures are drawn with white chalk 346 on the fence. Usually there are three out-houses, a [343] vadakkettu on the north side serving as a kitchen, a cattle-shed, and a tekketu on the southern side, where [164] some family spirit is located. These are generally those of Maruta, *i.e.*, some member of the family who has died of small-pox. A sword or other weapon, and a seat or other emblem is located within this out-house, which is also known by the names of gurusala (the house of a saint), kalari (military training-ground), and daivappura [782] (house of a deity). The tekketu is lighted up every evening, and periodical offerings are made to propitiate 351 the deities enshrined within. In the south-west corner [312] is the serpent kavu (grove), and by its side a tank for [245] bathing purposes. Various useful trees are grown in the garden, such as the jack, areca palm, cocoanut, plantain, tamarind and mango.

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bangle there by a messenger. An Akattu Charna Nāyar wore an amulet to keep off the spirit of a Brāhman who died by drowning. Another had a silver ring, on which a piece of a bristle from an elephant's tail was arranged."

Tattooing is said by Mr. Subramani Aiyar not to be favoured by North Travancore Nāyars, and to be only practiced by Nāyar women living to the south of Quilon. Certain accounts trace it to the invasion of Travancore by a Moghul Sirdar in 1680 A.D. In modern times it has become rare. The operation is performed by women of the Odda or Kurava caste before a girl reaches the twelfth year.

Concerning the religious worship of the Nāyars, Mr. Subramani Aiyar writes that "Buchanan notes that the proper deity of the Nāyars is Vishnu, though they wear the mark of Siva on their foreheads. By this is merely meant that they pay equal reverence to both Siva and Vishnu, being Smartas converted to the tenets of Saṅkaracharya. Besides worshipping the higher Hindu deities, the Nāyars also manifest their adoration for several minor ones, such as Mātan, Utayam, Yakshi, Chattan, Chantakarnan, Murti, Maruta, and Arukula. Most of these have granite representations, or at least such emblems as a sword or a cane, and are provided with a local habitation. Besides these, persons who have met with accidental death, and girls who have died before their tāli-tying ceremony, are specially worshipped under the designations of Kazhichchavu and Kannichchavu. Magicians are held in some fear, and talismanic amulets are attached to the waist by members of both sexes. Kuttichattan, the mischievous imp of Malabar, is supposed to cause much misery. Various spirits are worshipped on the Tiruvonam day in the month of Avani (August-September), on the Uchcharam or 28th

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early in the morning to gather flowers, of which the kadali is the most important. On their return, they sit in front of the tulasi (sacred basil) mandapam, make a carpet-like bed of the blossoms which they have collected, and place a clay image of Ganapati in the centre. A writer in the Calcutta Review * describes how having set out at dawn to gather blossoms, the children return with their beautiful spoils by 9 or 10 A.M., and then the daily decoration begins. The chief decoration consists of a carpet made out of the gathered blossoms, the smaller ones being used in their entirety, while the large flowers, and one or two varieties of foliage of different tints, are pinched up into little pieces to serve the decorator's purpose. This flower carpet is invariably made in the centre of the clean strip of yard in front of the neat house. Often it is a beautiful work of art, accomplished with a delicate touch and a highly artistic sense of tone and blending. The carpet completed, a miniature pandal (booth), hung with little festoons, is erected over it, and at all hours of the day neighbours look in, to admire and criticise the beautiful handiwork."

"Various field sports, of which foot-ball is the chief, are indulged in during the Ônam festival. To quote Paulinus once more, the men, particularly those who are young, form themselves into parties, and shoot at each other with arrows. These arrows are blunted, but exceedingly strong, and are discharged with such force that a considerable number are generally wounded on both sides. These games have a great likeness to the Ceralia and Juvenalia of the ancient Greeks and Romans."

* January, 1899.

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796 564 [793] garden fence at the seething procession in the lane below must be left to the imagination. It will have been noticed that the Nambūtiris hold aloof from the festival; they purify the temple before and after, but no more. 796 793 571 The importance attached to the various offices of those who are attached to the temple by however slender a thread, was illustrated by a rather amusing squabble between two of the Mukkuvans, an uncle and nephew, as to which of them should receive the silver umbrella from the temple, and bear it to the house of the goldsmith to be repaired. During the festival, one of them made a rapid journey to the Zamorin (about fifty miles distant), paid some fees, and established himself as the senior who had the right to carry the umbrella.

796 184 "An important local festival is that held near Palghat, in November, in the little suburb Kalpāti inhabited entirely by Pattar Brāhmans from the east. But it is not a true Malayāli festival, and it suffices to mention its existence, for it in no way represents the religion of the Nāyar. The dragging of cars, on which are placed the images of deities, common everywhere from the temple of Jagganath at Pūri in Orissa to Cape Comorin, is quite unknown in Malabar, excepting only at Kalpāti, which is close to the eastern frontier of Malabar.

782 [131] [346] [635] [126] [532] "Near Chowghāt (Chavagāt), about 30 miles to the southward of Calicut, on the backwater, at a place called Guruvayūr, is a very important temple, the property of the Zamorin, yielding a very handsome revenue. I visited the festival on one occasion, and purchase was made of a few offerings such as are made to the temple in satisfaction of vows—a very rude representation of an infant in silver, a hand, a leg, an ulcer, a pair of eyes, and, most curious of all, a silver string which represents a man, the giver. Symbolization of the offering of self is made by